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ABSTRACT

While school reform has already dramatically altered the culture of education in Kentucky, the future holds daunting challenges. This chapter examines a few of the most difficult changes being implemented as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), as well as conditions external to schools that markedly influence educational success. One KERA reform--the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)--is a true "high stakes" accountability system, meant to drive instruction and curriculum and form the basis for rewards and sanctions. However, scholarly reviews of KIRIS have revealed reliability problems, and little is known about whether financial incentives to educators will actually improve student learning. Other KERA reforms in progress are the setting of rigorous academic standards, which require development of parallel curricula and a change in the way Kentuckians think about schools as institutions, and the creation of site-based decision-making councils that give teachers, parents, and administrators authority over key education matters. Other factors influencing the future of education are trends in teacher demographics and professional development, budgetary problems and educational funding needs, the aging of the population, and child welfare conditions. (SV)

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Trends and Issues Affecting Primary and Secondary Education

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Trends and Issues Affecting Primary and Secondary Education

While school reform has already dramatically altered the culture of education in Kentucky, the future holds daunting challenges. From the development of accurate tools of assessment to enable reliable measures of accountability, to the elevation of academic standards, to the institutionalization of participative decisionmaking processes, the work of reform continues. It will be broadly influenced by changing student and teacher demographics, by how generously we fund efforts to provide the best possible education to all children in the Commonwealth, and by how quickly we move from the framework of reform to commitment.

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Imagine that we could transport ourselves back in time, about 10 years, and receive our assignment for this essay: tell Kentucky readers about the likely directions for Kentucky education over the next five or so years. From the perspective of the mid-1980s we would have written of the possibility—not the prospect—of increasing school funding and improving educational performance so that Kentucky could climb out of the nation's educational cellar. No longer would Kentucky be 45th in per pupil expenditures or 50th in high school graduates in the population, we might have said, if the state were to make a full-fledged commitment to vastly improved schools.

We might have hoped but not predicted in 1986 that, with luck, Kentucky would eliminate nepotism in hiring, replace the politically selected state school superintendent with a commissioner responsible to the state board of education, and provide preschool experience to all its four-year-olds. We might have hoped, although we would not have predicted, that high learning standards would be established for all Kentucky students and that schools would be held accountable for helping students achieve them. In 1986, we could not have forecast the 1989 *Rose vs. Council for Better Schools* decision of the Kentucky Supreme Court. Nor would we have predicted that Kentucky educators would, in 1996, be implementing the nation's most sweeping and comprehensive attempt to increase learning for all students.

That these conditions are in place shows palpably how the education landscape and our conversations about education have changed. As a matter of course now, for instance, we think of the state school system as being led by a commissioner of education, hired as a result of a national search, and accountable to a state board. It is no longer part of our thinking that the elected superintendent of public schools will be gone every four years, using the department of education for patronage hiring and as a platform for yet another public office.

In debates over the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), we have not heard anyone argue for returning to an elected state superintendent. Likewise, we have heard no serious call for eliminating high academic standards, preschool programs, family resource and youth services centers, school councils, increased school funding, or other reform components. Our educational future is thus shaped by our current policy architecture. It is also shaped by how effectively that architecture helps all Kentucky children learn.

Researchers who are studying large scale, comprehensive educational changes like Kentucky's conclude that it is terribly difficult and slow for new state policies to affect what happens in classrooms. They compare the process of implementing change to a violent storm sweeping

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across the ocean. We see smashing surf on the surface and perhaps some turbulence a few feet below, but at the ocean floor dead calm remains.

In *Tinkering Toward Reform*, Stanford professors Larry Cuban and David Tyack stress the need to learn from our history. They emphasize the power of the time lag between "advocacy, adoption and implementation" of educational changes. Reforms respond to problems, legislation is passed, but "implementation has a momentum and schedule of its own." Past reforms were frequently just "add ons" that "did not disturb the standard operating procedures of the schools." Those reforms which endured were "noncontroversial;" they "did not exceed the pedagogical speed limit, did not directly challenge the public's notion of what a real school ought to be doing." A real school, of course, is one that looks pretty much like those adults attended when they were children. "When educators see reform demands as inappropriate, they are skilled in finding ways to temper or evade their effects," Tyack and Cuban observe.

So Kentucky has confronted its historical educational deficiencies and is working its way toward solutions. But influencing those solutions and implementing them is very difficult work. Trends that will affect Kentucky schools are exerting influence within and outside of the educational system. We focus in this essay on a few of the most difficult educational policies being attempted. External to the educational system we concentrate on conditions that always have and always will shape public schools the most—the condition of families and school children.

Increasing Student Learning Through Accountability, Assessment

What happens over the next few years with Kentucky's new accountability and assessment system will shape Kentucky's educational future profoundly. Changing the incentives to encourage good teaching in Kentucky schools is the biggest lever available to policymakers, and Kentucky is using that lever like no other state. In 1989 and early 1990, when the reform plan that became the Kentucky Education Reform Act was germinating, many political leaders and education policy specialists here and around the country argued that accountability was the key to improving American schools. Without school accountability, they said, the public would be unwilling to accept tax increases to fund education adequately. Further, we would not know what knowledge and skills were most important for all Kentucky students and whether students were indeed learning.

They also believed, rightly, that existing standardized tests had encouraged educational malnutrition in Kentucky and across America. Proponents of an accountability-oriented reform prevailed, and the result was the creation of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) tests and portfolios to measure student performance, and a system of rewards and sanctions for schools and teachers.

Since 1990, Kentucky has been the first state to incorporate accountability, financial rewards and aid to help schools improve, sanctions for poor performance, and aid for distinguished educators into its educational program, a true "high stakes" accountability system. Numerous other states, including Vermont and California, have either recently passed or are moving forward on plans for their own high stakes assessment programs. But this has been a hazardous road, full of detours and potholes. No national tests of the sort envisioned in 1990 were available for states like Kentucky in 1990, so the Commonwealth had to develop its own.

New tests measure school performance for accountability and form the basis for financial rewards. Their purposes are to show citizens and parents how well schools are doing at their job of educating students, and to provide appropriate consequences for schools that are effective, as well as those that are not. The tests are also meant to drive instruction and curriculum. Because testing is driving instruction, and because it has real consequences for teachers, it is imperative that it be done extremely well and that it be credible.

But parents expect tests, in addition to measuring school performance, to provide individual scores *and* national comparisons for their children. The big question is whether one test can do all of this; no one knows for certain, but most experts are doubtful. The challenge Kentucky faces

is being confronted all over America, as all states attempt to create high and measurable academic performance standards.

Inventing and using new assessments has been a costly, time-consuming, and somewhat error-prone process. The first round of KIRIS exams yielded decent performance instruments and reasonable baseline scores for schools. Student performance, particularly at the elementary level, has increased substantially. But scholarly reviews of the tests have revealed reliability problems, and the rhetoric of these reviews (for example, "fundamentally flawed") raised questions about KIRIS that were as damaging as the criticisms of the standardized tests that preceded.[1] (KIRIS is, incidentally, Kentucky's fourth statewide test since 1979. Those tests too, a critic said in 1986, were "seriously flawed.")

The State Board of Education has recently negotiated a new testing contract, and the next round of exams should allay many concerns raised by testing experts, teachers, and parents. However, if serious problems continue to plague the assessment system it could spell trouble for this most crucial school improvement component. The accountability system that KIRIS helps structure is an integral part of the political contract struck in the Kentucky reform package. If this system falters due to assessment troubles, the public may lose confidence in public schools and the possibility of improving them.

Several potentially serious problems lurk within this incentive structure. With regard to the reward system, little is known, either from research or from experience in other states, about how financial incentives will improve student learning. Recent research on Kentucky suggests that rewards are associated with increased teacher efficacy. But it is as yet unclear if the rewards are a cause or effect of teachers' beliefs and practices.[2] Incentive systems are, indeed, hard to construct.

Teacher reactions to rewards have also been mixed. Many teachers say that financial incentives do not motivate them, but whether this reaction is deeply held is not yet clear. Said one principal, "If rewards become part of the regular landscape, just a 'regular thing' for about 10 years, teachers' negative views will change."

The attitudes and behaviors of students and parents will have to change before achievement levels will rise significantly, no matter how diligently educators work to improve learning.

The current incentive structure in Kentucky education also neglects the role of students. As we are reminded in an excellent new book edited by Susan Fuhrman and Jennifer O'Day, teachers, no matter how conscientious or motivated, have limited control over their students' responses to increased work and higher expectations.[3] And, since secondary school grades are not important for admission to most postsecondary institutions or for getting most jobs, incentives are not strong for high school students to study more diligently than before under a "reformed" regime. A successful future for improvements may well depend upon incentives for students in college admission and employment.

Certain aspects of American culture and youth culture also militate against student achievement. Laurence Steinberg and his colleagues argue that school reforms have failed largely because of factors in the community and beyond the control of schools.[4] Almost one in three parents is disengaged from his or her adolescents' education. Doing well in school is valued by only one in five youths. And only about 15 percent of the average youngster's waking hours each week is spent doing things that contribute to academic achievement. The attitudes and behaviors of stu-

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[1] National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). (1996). *Profile of 1994-95 state assessment systems and reported results.* Washington, DC: Author.

[2] Winograd, P., Anderman, E., Bliss, T. (1996, January). *The relationship between Kentucky's reward system and teaching attitudes toward teaching, learning, and reform.* (Policy Brief). Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Institute for Education Reform.

[3] Fuhrman, S.H., O'Day, J.A. (1996). *Rewards and reform: Creating education incentives that work.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[4] Steinberg, L. (1996, July 11). Failure outside the classroom. *The Wall Street Journal,* p. A16.

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dents and parents will have to change before achievement levels will rise significantly, no matter how diligently educators work to improve learning.

Kentucky has based its reform on the idea that real incentives and real school accountability coupled with school flexibility, local decisionmaking, more school funding, and other helpful school programs will vastly increase learning. Five years of implementing such a dramatic change now seems just a blip in the long sweep of time. Much of what will happen in the future as a result of true school accountability depends upon changes in the larger community, the response of educators to increased demands, and the skills of those who design and study tests.

Setting Rigorous Academic Standards

Kentucky's school system has set high academic standards for students to reverse Kentucky's dismal educational record. The process of creating such standards has been less visible to the public than other reforms, although no less important. The long list of academic expectations that has been developed and rewritten several times sets high and reasonable goals for students, but is too vague to replace the traditionally prepackaged, textbook-driven curriculum teachers used before with teacher-designed curriculum. A time-consuming, collaborative process has been underway for years to develop standards-related curricular guidelines for teachers to use in the classroom, material that is linked to the KIRIS assessments.

Two points stand out in the process of setting and achieving high academic standards. First, it is crucial to continue and intensify Kentucky's standards-setting efforts if significant learning achievement gains are to be reached. This is especially true for academically disadvantaged students who often suffer when schools decide for themselves what these children can learn—usually not very much. The national standards movement has yielded curricular guidelines in several subject areas (although these are of uneven quality), but the nation has again balked at obliging states to adhere to standards set in Washington. This makes state standard-setting activities like Kentucky's much more critical. Only clearly identified, content-laden and coherent standards in all subject areas can guide good teaching, help eliminate gaps in curriculum and, in conjunction with KIRIS, drive continuous improvements aimed at measurable goals. An honest quest for such high, specific academic standards will be arduous and will take political courage and skill. Kentucky and other states have failed to develop rigorous common academic standards in the past, partly because it is difficult for citizens and teachers to agree on what is worth knowing. It has been easier for states to avoid the issue altogether, leaving standards to textbook publishers and standardized testing companies.

Second, a genuine standards-based education system will require Kentuckians to change the way they think about schools as institutions. With genuine standards in place, everyone associated with elementary and secondary schools must become more focused on what is taught and learned than on the means of teaching. A content-oriented approach will require more collegiality, cooperation, and egalitarianism among school staff—from teacher aides to college of education faculty members—than now exists. It is not clear that citizens of the Commonwealth, including those within the education establishment or the political leadership, are ready to embrace such new ideas about schooling even though improving Kentucky's education system will depend on it.

Whether or not they are ready for it, Kentucky parents, teachers, and administrators may soon be obliged to grapple with all these issues if the Kentucky Department of Education adopts the excellent recommendations offered last summer by the Kentucky Commission on High School Graduation Requirements. In its report, the Commission recognized that the current Program of Studies for high schools is badly out of sync with the new higher learning goals and academic expectations. It offered a three-prong plan for bringing them back into alignment with one another. First, the state should create a new Program of Studies designed around minimum course requirements, with the involvement of local boards, high schools and communities in developing more rigorous course requirements and tailoring the curriculum for individual schools. Second,

the Commission calls for KIRIS tests to be altered so that individual high school students can receive meaningful reports on their progress and so diplomas can be granted at different levels based on demonstrated skill mastery. Third, high school transcripts should be revamped to be much more comprehensive and revealing, providing portfolios of test scores, essays, career plans, project presentations, and the like.[5]

Adopting these recommendations will require a gargantuan amount of work in high school communities across the state. But an effort of this sort, targeted at the high school level, built around high standards, accountability, strong academic programs at each site, and involving civic leaders, parents, and others into designing educational environments will be necessary if improved teaching in the early grades is not to "wash out" during the middle school and secondary years.

Site-Based Decisionmaking Councils

Kentucky's education system is now designed as a set of integrated measures and not a hodge podge of programs. The primary school program, the Support Educational Efforts in Kentucky (SEEK) funding formula, extended school services, family resource and youth services centers, and other components are all parts of a system aimed at increased student learning which is measured.

An important part of this overall design is the school-based decisionmaking councils that give teachers, parents, and administrators authority over key education matters. The school councils may have been oversold as agents of reform, but they are a tool with much potential for democratizing the education process and bringing about building-level improvements. Councils have the potential to become vehicles by which schools focus on rigorous standards and content, develop well tailored assessment systems, improve professional development, and the like. School councils could also serve as mediating institutions, brokering and directing change among school personnel, and increasing parent knowledge of and involvement in school operations.

It is still too early to pass judgment on the effectiveness of councils in Kentucky schools. Although 1,090 schools have councils, it may take several years for councils to meet the expectations set for them. The past five years should be seen as a period of mere compliance with new laws requiring councils. Only now can councils begin to focus in earnest on improving academic quality.

Our impression at this point, however, is that many councils are falling short of their primary goal, which is vastly improving student learning at the school level. According to Jane David, a researcher who has studied school-based decisionmaking extensively, much council energy has been expended on nonacademic issues, and relatively few parents in schools are involved in site-based decisionmaking work.[6]

Since councils are still fledgling institutions, we should not expect too much of them until they have had a chance to mature and develop. If they fail to ignite interest among parents or to become useful instruments for forcing improved practices and better ideas into schools, we will need to reconsider Kentucky's goals for these councils. Even if this happens, however, the terms of discussion will have been changed from the period of top-down local school management. The fact is that councils exist in law parallel to local school boards and local central office administrators. If councils are measured by the yardstick of what they do to increase student learning, then boards and central office administrators will be measured by this standard too.

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[5] Kentucky Commission on High School Graduation Requirements. (1996). *Clear connections and shared responsibility: A new approach to high school graduation requirement.* (Findings and Recommendations of the Kentucky Commission on High School Graduation Requirements). Frankfort, KY: Department of Education.

[6] David, J.L. (1994, August). *School-based decision making: Linking decisions to learning: Third-year report to the Prichard Committee*. Lexington, KY: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

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Teacher Demographics and Retraining

Kentucky's teachers are absolutely central to improving Kentucky schools. But the state's 38,000 classroom teachers will, as a group, be changing over the next decade, and these changes will likely have a profound impact on education.

However, sudden or dramatic shifts in the teacher workforce are *not likely*. A recent Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report provides the most up-to-date information on teacher demographic trends. The teaching force has remained remarkably stable for many years, with 93 to 94 percent of all teachers having worked in the classroom during the previous year, and anywhere from 4 percent to 6 percent of teachers retiring or leaving the classroom in any given year.[7] The SREB report and a separate research study found no significant increase in teacher attrition after the Kentucky Education Reform Act.[8] This is an important finding because some disgruntled teachers have referred to KERA as the "Kentucky Early Retirement Act." Rhetoric and reality conflict in this case.

Some disgruntled teachers have referred to KERA as the "Kentucky Early Retirement Act." Rhetoric and reality conflict in this case.

The total teacher workforce in Kentucky, however, has grown by 8 percent since 1990, even though student enrollment has increased by only 1 percent. Projections are that teacher supply will meet demand over the coming years, so a shortage is not likely in the next 5 to 10 years.

However, school administrators report great difficulty in finding qualified and interested candidates for school principal openings, particularly for high schools. Recruiting minority teachers, especially in science and math, is also a substantial and unmet challenge.

What is most interesting here is the effect on schooling as veteran teachers, trained in a different era, retire and are replaced by more recent teacher education graduates. Newly trained teachers are more likely to practice the types of teaching and classroom organization designed to reach all children and increase learning. It is possible, therefore, that new ideas and practices will enter Kentucky schools most rapidly through attrition and replacement.

But current teachers also need to see themselves as part of a constantly changing profession and not as practitioners with skills that never need to be updated or adapted. The evolving nature of the teaching profession and the need for continuous improvement must be internalized by new teachers and promoted by policymakers. If this is not done, we risk retaining a teaching force unable to adapt to change and unable to respond to improved professional development even when it is made available.

Central to the skills of teachers is the status of professional development. Over the past few years, the professional development of teachers has been taken much more seriously. Efforts have been made to make it more useful, more intellectually demanding, and less time-killing drudgery. But building teacher capacity to help students reach higher standards is a massive undertaking that needs greater emphasis and more time. Unfortunately, polls show that while American parents believe teachers need constant retraining, they do not want professional development to take time away from the classroom. The common misconception that teachers are not working if they are not with children persists. The time available for teachers to do all that is expected of them, and for serious professional development, needs to be increased.

Whether professional development for teachers can be improved enough to significantly improve classroom practices, whether enough time can be made available, and whether it can be delivered in an effective manner remain open questions. Nor is it clear whether the training of teachers at the college level will improve across the board as much as is needed. Future im-

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[7] Southern Regional Education Board and Data and Decision Analysis, Inc. (1996, March). *Educator supply and demand in Kentucky*. Report on Phase Two.

[8] Shake, M.C., Slaton, D.B., Atwood, V.A., Hales, R.M. (1995, April). Effects of educational reform on teachers' decisions to retire. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 4*, 143-152.

provements in student achievement, however, will clearly hinge upon whether teacher capacity is enhanced dramatically.

Education Funding

Funding inequities among Kentucky school districts have prompted numerous school funding reform programs in the past. They also gave rise to the 1985 lawsuit that resulted in the *Rose* decision and the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Education finance issues are still crucial to the future of Kentucky schools.

Overall education funding has increased 46 percent as a result of the 1990 reform act. This is a substantial financial commitment by Kentuckians to improve education. The spending increase and the new distribution system have reduced the gap in per student spending between "wealthier" and "poorer" school districts by 52 percent.

After substantial spending growth since 1990, however, Kentucky's education budget has returned to normal growth levels. The 1996 General Assembly approved a 4 percent increase for 1996-1997 over the previous year's budget to be followed in 1997-1998 by a 3 percent increase. Much of the new money each year will be funneled into teacher salary raises, so many categories of funding within the overall education budget will see no increase or will be reduced over the next biennium. For example, staff development, extended school services, technology, distinguished educators, and textbooks will all be level-funded, so inflation will erode spending capacity in these areas.

In addition, certain programs have never been fully funded. Kentucky is still far from reaching its ambitious goals of providing preschool opportunities for all qualifying children, family resource centers to all eligible schools, distinguished educators to all schools that need them, or an adequate level of technology in every classroom. Without sufficient state funds, Kentucky also lacks a critical tool for meeting the financial needs of both its poorest and its wealthiest school districts.

The outlook for education spending beyond 1997-1998 cannot be predicted. Executive branch experts resist projecting spending beyond two- or four-year cycles, a product of limited technical capacity and the pitfalls of making the wrong projections. However, annual increases beyond the 3 percent to 5 percent range are highly unlikely. Such minimal increases will barely cover growth in salaries and fringe benefits of education personnel in Kentucky. They will not help the state maintain even current levels of service, much less move forward to higher levels so as to equalize funding and provide adequate educational opportunities for Kentucky children.

One condition is clear: Kentucky's revenue system does not produce revenue equal to growth in the economy because those sectors of the economy that have grown most vigorously in recent years (e.g., the service sector) are taxed at a lower level—if they are taxed at all—than traditional sectors of the economy. Moreover, the state's obligation for Medicare and prisons will increasingly squeeze out funding for schools and universities. Adjusting this inadequate tax system so growth is assured is imperative, as is controlling state spending for health care.

An important subplot of the education finance story involves the physical plant of Kentucky schools and the need to maintain or replace school buildings over the next decade or so. According to the federal General Accounting Office, Kentucky is in better shape than many states in terms of its school buildings, having run a comprehensive facilities program for a number of years. State and local governments in Kentucky have spent around $1.3 billion since 1986 on facilities, and Frankfort continues to spend approximately $60 million per year on capital projects for school districts.

Nevertheless, the needs for the future are staggering. One official estimate is that Kentucky has $2.7 billion in unmet education physical plant needs. Wayne Young, executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, estimates that the facilities situation in the state is nearing the point of critical mass. Many buildings are in surprisingly good shape for being 70 or 80 years old, he says. But as these older structures slip beyond the point of repair in coming

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years, the burden of replacing them will be great. Moreover, the price of constructing new buildings in Kentucky has increased with the passage of the prevailing wage bill in the 1996 General Assembly.

The Kentucky legislature must cope with these costs without allowing them to overwhelm the ongoing budget needs of education. Toward that end, policymakers should consider not just constructing and repairing buildings but devising ways to use facilities more efficiently.

Related to future education funding is the matter of time in school. National reports and the Prichard Committee's own report, *A Matter of Time,* emphasize that meeting higher learning standards and more effective teacher professional development cannot be achieved unless educators spend more time on these tasks and spend that time more effectively.[9] Some Kentucky school districts are creatively finding ways to "invent" more time or spend local school funds on additional days. The future will ultimately be shaped, however, by a state-level decision to support extra days of employment for teachers in the school year.

Demographics and the Condition of Children

Shifts in population within Kentucky will also play an important role in the future of education. The U.S. Department of Education has projected an increase in the total number of children in school over the next decade. Although this increase will be due primarily to the inclusion of more kindergarten students plus lower dropout rates, according to Education Secretary Richard Riley, this boomlet will nevertheless require more than $15 billion in new spending and the hiring of some 190,000 additional teachers.

In Kentucky, though, the situation is shaping up very differently. Ron Crouch and his colleagues at the Kentucky State Data Center describe the Commonwealth as being "at risk" over the next two decades because the number of school-age children here will remain steady or even decline as the number of older Kentuckians increases substantially. In 1998, Crouch reports, the number of 14-year-olds will be the lowest in 50 years. In 1950, 73,000 children were born in Kentucky; in 1994 the number was 51,000. Today only one third of all Kentucky households have school-age children. At the moment, the Kentucky economy does not appear to be producing desirable jobs at an adequate rate to attract enough new workers and young families to offset these trends, or even to retain many of our most promising young high school and college graduates.

This combination of an aging population—a significant portion of which is unskilled and undereducated—and a nonexpanding pool of school-age children could create troublesome social and political dynamics. With this demographic "inverted pyramid," as Crouch calls it, the pressures to provide social support services for older workers and retirees will become greater and the political clout of families with children may weaken. Within the context of limited state revenue, this could mean that resources are diverted from elementary and secondary schools to other education and support services. Education and training programs are crucial for Kentuckians of all ages. But shifting resources away from the basic investment in elementary and secondary schooling would not be a strategically sound approach, though the politics of demographics may encourage it.

Much of Kentucky's future will depend upon how effectively the state confronts the appalling condition of its children. According to the 1996 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, Kentucky ranks 36th among the states in indicators of children's well-being. Kentucky has been improving in the areas of infant mortality, high school dropout rates, and the dropout unemployment rate. But the state made no improvement in the child death rate and teen birth rate, and lost ground between 1985 and 1993 in the teen violent death rate, juvenile crime, children in poverty, and families headed by a single parent.[10]

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[9] Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. (1995, December). A matter of time: Creating high-performance schools. *Keepin' on: Five years down the road to better schools.* Lexington, KY: Author.

[10] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1996). *KID'S COUNT Data Book.* Baltimore, MD: Author.

These trends are discouraging, especially those involving increasing numbers of impoverished children and children in single-parent households, who are far more likely to live in poverty than those in two-parent households. Children in these conditions face special barriers to becoming well educated. Nor have educators or communities determined the most effective means of ameliorating the effects of these conditions. Add to this worsening situation the unpredictable impact of national welfare reform, recently signed into law, and state policymakers will have their hands full over the next few years.

Conclusion

The conditions affecting the future of Kentucky schools that we emphasize here do not exhaust the possibilities. They are, in our judgment, those that are most compelling today; others will emerge tomorrow. Obviously, national conditions and directions will affect Kentucky, but we believe that what Kentuckians do for themselves in education will be more important than what happens nationally.

Most of the pieces of Kentucky's new education system are in place in a legal sense. Broad compliance with new laws has already taken place. Primary school organization, for example, exists in all schools where they are required. The future depends, however, on moving from compliance to commitment. Commitment means that the quality of teaching in every classroom is sufficiently high to permit every child to learn to the maximum of his or her capability—a tremendous and daunting challenge.

History is littered with educational reforms that were abandoned before they were ever implemented, before they ever reached the classroom. In 1990, historian Thomas D. Clark observed that the real work has just begun, the work of moving improved education "from the legislature to the classroom." In 1996, Kentucky finds itself on the way down this most difficult road as it moves toward genuinely improved teaching, for all students, in all of its classrooms.

The direction in which Kentucky is headed can overcome the educational wasteland of the past century.

Compared to 10 years ago, Kentucky today finds itself in a remarkable, historically unique position as the center of national attention. Reform and change have become integral to the Kentucky educational system and subject to the analysis, criticism, and suggestions for improvement that would be expected to accompany any other system. The direction in which Kentucky is headed can overcome the educational wasteland of the past century. But six years after 1990, the magnitude of the challenges inherent in transforming Kentucky's schools are also more apparent. From the experience of Kentucky's educators, we know much more about these challenges. The future of education in Kentucky, whether Kentucky maintains its leadership role, and whether it educates each child well, hinges upon how effectively and how quickly these challenges are met.

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